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PART XIII.

PROPOSALS OF THE DE FACTO GOVERNMENT OF MEXICO FOR TERMINATING THE EUROPEAN WAR.

Mr. Ramón P. De Negri to the Secretary of State.

[Translation.]

MEXICAN EMBASSY,
Washington, February 12, 1917.

MR. SECRETARY:

I have the honor to transcribe to your excellency the following note, which the Secretary of Foreign Relations of my country has been pleased to write to me:

QUERÉTARO, *February 11, 1917.*

SEÑOR RAMON P. DE NEGRI, Washington, D. C.: Please transcribe to the most excellent the minister of foreign relations of that country the following note:

“By direction of Citizen Venustiano Carranza, First Chief of the Constitutionalist Army, in charge of the executive power of the Mexican Nation, I have the honor of addressing to your excellency the following note, which the above-named high mandatory has seen fit to send to the neutral countries:

“It is more than two years since the most gigantic armed conflict recorded in history broke out in the old continent, sowing death, desolation, and destitution in the belligerent nations. The tragic contest has deeply wounded the sentiments of humanity of all the peoples that are not engaged in the struggle, and their standing unmoved before so great a disaster would be contrary to both justice and humaneness. A deep-seated sentiment of human solidarity then constrains the Mexican Government to tender its modest coöperation in endeavoring to bring the strife to an end. On the other hand, the conflagration in Europe has reached such proportions and the situation of the countries which remained neutral has grown more and more trying, bringing them, as it has, to the verge of being involved in that war; and several nations which at the outset took no part in the conflict have found themselves irresistibly drawn into it.

“Those countries which at present are still preserving their neutrality in the world and truly desire to keep out of the conflict must combine their efforts toward bringing about the earliest possible termination of the European war, or at least so circumscribing it as to remove the possibility of further complications and thus bring into sight an early ending.

The present European conflict effects the whole world, like a great conflagration, a severe plague which ought to have been isolated and confined some time ago so as to shorten its life and prevent its spreading. Far from doing this, the trade of all the neutral countries in the world, and that of America in particular, bears a heavy responsibility before history, because all the neutral nations—some more, some less—have lent their quota of money, provisions, ammunition, or fuel, and in this way have kept up and prolonged the great conflagration.

“Reasons of high human morality and of national self-conservation place the neutral peoples under the obligation of desisting from that course and of refusing to lend any longer that quota which made it possible to carry on the war for two years and more.

“To that end the Government of Mexico, within the bounds of the strictest respect due to the sovereignty of the warring countries, inspired by the highest humanitarian sentiments, and also actuated by the sentiment of self-conservation and defense, takes the liberty of proposing to your excellency’s Government, as it is proposing to all the other neutral Governments, that the groups of contending powers be invited, in common accord and on the basis of absolutely perfect equality on either side, to bring this war to an end, either by their own effort or by availing themselves of the good offices of friendly mediation of all the countries which would jointly extend that invitation. If within a reasonable term peace could not be restored by this means, the neutral countries would then take the necessary measures to reduce the conflagration to its narrowest limit by refusing any kind of implements to the belligerents and suspending commercial relations with the warring nations until the said conflagration shall have been smothered.

“The Mexican Government is not unconscious of its somewhat departing from the principles of international law which have heretofore regulated the relations between neutrals and belligerents when it offers its propositions; but it must be admitted that the present war is a conflict without a precedent in the history of mankind that demands supreme efforts and novel remedies that are not to be found among the narrow and somewhat selfish rules of international law as accepted until now. Mexico believes that, confronted by a catastrophe of such large proportions the like of which never was seen, by a war in which political, social, military, and economic factors that could never be foreseen have been brought into play, it can not go astray

in proposing that the remedies to be applied to the conflict be also new, extraordinary, and commensurate with the circumstances.

"The Government of Mexico understands that no neutral nation, no matter how mighty, could singly take a step of this character, and that the measure can only be brought to a successful issue through the coöperation of the neutral governments wielding the greatest international influence with the belligerent nations.

"It is specially incumbent on the United States, Argentina, Brazil and Chile in America; Spain, Sweden, and Norway in Europe, as being more influential and freer to arrive at a decision toward the belligerents, to father an initiative which is none the less worthy of thorough study and earnest consideration than for its coming from a nation which is supposed to be weakened at present and therefore incapable of any effective international effort.

"The Government of Mexico cherishes the hope that if this idea is accepted and put into practice it may serve as a precedent and basis for a new shaping of international law that would give neutrals the opportunity to assist in preventing and mending future international wars while most strictly [respecting] the sovereignty of the belligerents.

"Countries thereafter finding themselves on the brink of war, would earnestly ponder before launching into a conflict in which they would be entirely thrown on their own resources, and so would exhaust every means in which to avoid it or shorten its duration if it proved unavoidable."

I avail myself of this opportunity to reiterate to your excellency the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) GEN. CANDIDO AGUILAR,
Minister of Foreign Relations of Mexico.

I have the honor to transcribe the foregoing to your excellency, having thus carried out my Government's instructions.

I take, etc.

R. P. DE NEGRI,
*Consul General of Mexico at San Francisco,
Cal., in Charge of Mexican Interests.*

The Secretary of State to Mr. Ramón P. de Negri.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE,
Washington, March 16, 1917.

SIR: I have to request that you will have the kindness to transmit to the President-elect of the Mexican Republic the following reply to

the communication of February 11, 1917, addressed by him to you with instructions to deliver it to the Government of the United States.

In his note of February 11, 1917, the President-elect proposes to all the neutral Governments that the "groups of contending powers [in the present European conflict] be invited, in common accord and on the basis of absolutely perfect equality on either side, to bring this war to an end either by their own effort or by availing themselves of the good offices or friendly mediation of all the countries which would jointly extend that invitation. If within a reasonable time peace could not be restored by these means, the neutral countries would then take the necessary measures to reduce the conflagration to its narrowest limit, by refusing any kind of implements to the belligerents and suspending commercial relations with the warring nations until the said conflagration shall have been smothered."

The Government of the United States has given careful and sympathetic consideration to the proposals of the *de facto* Government, not only because they come from a neighboring republic in whose welfare and friendship the United States has a peculiar and permanent interest, but because these proposals have for their end the object which the President had hoped to attain from his discussion a few months ago of the aims of the belligerents and their purposes in the war. Of the futile results of the President's efforts at that time General Carranza is no doubt aware. Instead of the conflict being resolved into a discussion of terms of peace, the struggle, both on land and on sea, has been renewed with intensified vigor and bitterness. To such an extent has one group of belligerents carried warfare on the high seas involving the destruction of American ships and the lives of American citizens, in contravention of the pledges heretofore solemnly given the Government of the United States, that it was deemed necessary within the past few weeks to sever relations with one of the Governments of the Allied Central Powers. To render the situation still more acute, the Government of the United States has unearthed a plot laid by the Government dominating the Central Powers to embroil not only the Government and people of Mexico, but also the Government and people of Japan in war with the United States. At the time this plot was conceived, the United States was at peace with the Government and people of the German Empire, and German officials and German subjects were not only enjoying but

abusing the liberties and privileges freely accorded to them on American soil and under American protection.

In these circumstances, all of which were existent when the note under acknowledgment was received, the Government of the United States finds itself, greatly to its regret and contrary to its desires, in a position which precludes it from participating at the present time in the proposal of General Carranza that the neutral governments jointly extend an invitation to the belligerent countries to bring the war to an end either by their own effort or by availing themselves of the good offices or friendly mediation of neutral countries.

At the present stage of the European struggle, the superiority of the Entente Powers on the seas has prevented supplies from reaching the Central Powers from the Western Hemisphere. To such a degree has this restriction of maritime commerce extended that all routes of trade between the Americas and the continent of Europe are either entirely cut off or seriously interrupted. This condition is not new. In 1915 the Central Governments complained of their inability to obtain arms and ammunition from the United States while these supplies were being shipped freely to the ports of their enemies. The discussion of the subject culminated in the American note of August 12, 1915 (a copy of which is inclosed),¹ to the Imperial and Royal Austro-Hungarian Government, upholding the contention of the United States that its inability to ship munitions of war to the Central Powers was not of its own desire or making, but was due wholly to the naval superiority of the Entente Powers. Believing that this position of the United States is based upon sound principles of international law and is consonant with the established practice of nations, the President directs me to say that he cannot bring himself to consider such a modification of these principles or of this practice as compliance with General Carranza's proposal to suspend commercial relations with the warring nations would entail.

The President regrets, therefore, that, however desirous he may be of coöperating with General Carranza in finding a solution of the world problem that is intruding itself upon all countries, he is, for the reasons set forth, unable at the present time to direct his energies toward the accomplishment of the lofty purposes of the President-elect in the way suggested by his proposals. The President would not be understood, however, as desiring to impede the progress of a

¹ Not printed.

movement leading to the resumption of peaceful relations between all of the belligerents, and would not, therefore, wish the Mexican Government to feel that his inability to act in the present stage of affairs should in any way militate against the attainment of the high ideals of General Carranza by the coöperation of other neutral Governments in the use of their good offices and friendly mediation to bring about the end of the terrible war which is being waged between the great powers of Europe.

I am, etc.,

ROBERT LANSING.